Letter From Mark Lane to Warned of 'Embarrassing

— San Francisco Examiner
UPI Telephoto

THE LAST HOUR

California Congressman Leo J. Ryan rests shortly after he escaped an attack by a knife-wielding member of the People's Temple in Jonestown, Guyana. Memphis attorney Mark Lane helped fight off the attacker whose blood spotted Ryan's shirt. Shaken by his narrow escape, Ryan left for the airstrip where he and four others were gunned down.

By ORVILLE HANCOCK and CLARK REID
Press-Scimitar Staff Writers

Attorney Mark Lane of Memphis wrote Rep. Leo Ryan an unfriendly letter Nov. 6 warning of a possible "embarrassing situation for the U.S. Government" if it continued to harass the People's Temple, Ryan's administrative assistant said today. However, in Guyana, Lane jumped to Ryan's defense, warding off a possibly fatal knife attack.

Joe Holsinger, Ryan's administrative assistant, told *The Press-Scimitar* he and Ryan both thought that the letter from Lane — known for his conspiracy theories and defense of James Earl Ray in the Martin Luther King killing — contained "typical attorney jargon" and they did not take the letter seriously.

Shortly before Rep. Ryan and four members of his party were gunned down in an ambush in Guyana, an attempt on Ryan's life was made at the Jonestown camp of the People's Temple. Lane grabbed the knife of a young man who lunged at the congressman, according to an eyewitness reporter.

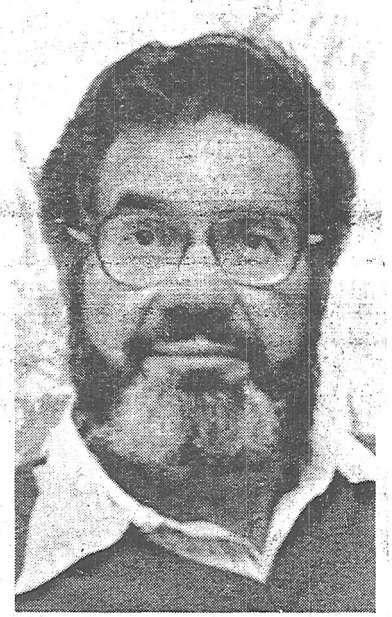
At a nearby airstrip, before the shooting, Ryan told the reporter: "I wouldn't be alive if it were not for Mark Lane."

Minutes later, the congressman was lying dead on the airstrip, his face shot away after at attack by members of the People's Temple, eyewitnesses said. Holsinger said he does not think Lane knew that Ryan would be killed when he visited the religious sect in Guyana, but added, "I'm afraid I'm too far into this thing to give an unbiased view."

Ryan got the Lane letter after he wrote cult leader Jim Jones "a very civil and very friendly letter" saying he had heard pros and cons about the group and would visit Guyana to see for himself what prompted reports that adherents were being held against their will.

In return, Holsinger said, Ryan received a letter from Lane, apparently acting as attorney for Jones.

Lane's warning to Ryan was made in a letter dated Nov. 6 which was released today.



MARK LANE

In that letter, Lane charged that "various agencies of the U.S. government have somewhat consistently oppressed the People's Temple institution.

"You may judge therefore," Lane wrote, "the important consequences which may flow from further persecution of People's Temple which might very well result in the creation of a most embarrassing situation for the U.S. government."

In a Nov. 10 reply to Lane, Ryan challenged the attorney's charges of government persecution, adding that his investigation of the People's Temple was at the request of the relatives of members of the cult who were concerned about their welfare.

"It is true that most of the comments I have heard from relatives are negative, but that is precisely the purpose of this inquiry," wrote Ryan. "Rather than take the word of relatives who can be presumed to be under some emotional bias, I intend to go to the source and to allow those 'on the other side' the opportunity to speak in their own behalf."

The representative told Lane, "your vague reference to the creation of the most embarrassing situation" for the United States "does not impress me at all."

"If the comment is intended as a threat, I believe it reveals more than may have been intended," concluded Ryan.

Rep. Ryan Situation'

Holsinger said Ryan felt that once he arrived in Guyana he would be able to convince the cultists "he really was there on a mission searching for the truth."

Holsinger said he showed Lane's letter to attorney Charles Garry, famed for his defense of the Black Panthers, in the belief Garry represented the Peoples Temple.

Garry was "pretty upset" by the letter, Holsinger said, and contended that he, and not Lane, was attorney for the group.

Lane, meanwhile was reported today to be staying in a Georgetown, Guyana, hotel, and was "apparently trying to straighten things out," according to an aide in Memphis.

Lane moved to Memphis from New York in early October and operates his office from his home at 1177 Central.

He said he came to Memphis to be near the sources of his investigation into his theory that James Earl Ray, whom he now represents, did not kill Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. alone. Lane contends there was a conspiracy and that the FBI played a role in the slaying.

He contends that Mrs. Grace Walden Stephens, who was in the South Main boarding house from which the fatal shot was fired, was illegally held in the state mental hospital to keep her from talking about what she knew of the King slaying.

Lane said Mrs. Stephens says she saw the killer of Dr. King run from the scene and that it was not Ray.

He has been named co-guardian of Mrs. Stephens.

Barbara Pickerell, 30, an assistant in Lane's Memphis office, said she had talked to another Lane aide in Washington last night who told her she had talked to Lane in Georgetown yesterday.

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The aide in Washington said Lane was staying in Georgetown, but was registered under a different name and was not talking to reporters.

"Apparently, he plans to remain down there for a while and try to help straighten out the situation," Ms. Pickerell said.

She said earlier reports that Lane was wounded were untrue.

"There have been no reports that he has been wounded," said Ms. Pickerell, during an afternoon of ringing telephones at Lane's home. "That was a mistake. We have no reason to believe he's been wounded."

Ms. Pickerell said she has been receiving reports from attorney April Ferguson, another aide to Lane, who flew to Washington, Sunday, and has been conferring with the State Department.

Ms. Pickerell said she had heard from Ms. Ferguson earlier yesterday that Lane stayed behind in Jonestown with Garry, Ms. Pickerell said.

Sue Pittman, press officer at the State Department, said "to the best of our knowledge" Lane and Garry were at Port Kaituma's airstrip and are now reported to be in Jonestown.

Lane, who had been doing legal work for the People's Temple for three months, had been summoned by Garry, the full time attorney of the commune, she said, when it was learned that Ryan was setting up a "fact finding team" to investigate conditions at the commune, Ms. Pickering said.

Ryan had gone to South America "to investigate claims by some of his constituents that their children were being held against their will, drugged and mistreated," Ms. Pickerell said.

Lane arrived in Jonestown "last Wednesday or Thursday," she said.

Apparently, Ryan and his party, including reporters and TV newsmen, left Jonestown before they were scheduled to leave, along with five or six people from the People's Temple who had apparently decided to come back with him to the United States via Georgetown, Miss Pickerell said.

Miss Pickerell said she believes Jones was "upset with Congressman Ryan for leaving" and Lane stayed behind to "soothe the situation," she said.

Ms. Pickerell said she has not slept since she heard the broadcast Saturday night. "And I won't until it's over," she said.